



ROUNABOUTS, AGAINST SOLITUDE

[NonPolitics](#) / 2023-11-22 / [gilet jaunes](#), [Riot](#), [roundabout](#) / Von [Cli](#)
[Ché](#)

Remembering and resisting the erasure of the rebellion of the Gilets Jaunes/Yellow Vests with a piece published with [lundi matin](#) (#400, 24/10/2024) and with an excellent documentary film dedicated to the same, entitled *Les Magnifiques Sauvages* (in french).

November 17 marked the 5th anniversary of the Yellow Vest [Gilets Jaunes] movement. We will publish below, in translation, a collection of plural voices who were part of the movement. It is a question of saving from oblivion – and contempt – this literature which was written on a daily basis during the Yellow Vest movement, and of making it available to all, of starting from the texts to reconstruct the color chart which has created and continues to create what will be called a yellow counterculture: a significant and still very much alive part of the thought from here below.

*we are the sum of each of us who thought we were alone,
[...] we now know what it is to be one as a body, [...]
because together we have caught the rage and we spread it
with Love.[1]*

These few words block out loneliness. They are the breath of the roundabouts, the strength of the pavement walked with comrades. They bear witness to this tremendous social energy which animated the Yellow Vest movement and many others in its wake, notably, that against pension reform.

Don't those who sleep fear that when they wake up/The scattered pieces of the world will no longer fit together?[2]

Class society has given way to a society of the isolated individual. And it's as if, one morning, when we wake up, we suddenly open our eyes to a world where the pieces – that is to say us – no longer fit together, no longer form a “body”. Of course, this didn't happen overnight.

Predatory capitalism is a process that gradually peppers the relational fabric with ruptures: transformations of the world of work (deindustrialisation, tertiarisation of the economy, “uberisation,” outsourcing, etc.); the paradox of social networks (stability or even multiplication of friendly relations but reduction of physical contacts); distrust towards the institutions guaranteeing social ties. These three points being widely documented and analyzed,^[3] I will content myself with giving some evocative figures before to return to the words of Yellow Vests.

In January 2021, 24% of the population was in a situation of relational isolation compared to 14% in January 2020, i.e. 10 points more according to CRÉDOC.^[4] The mortality rate increased threefold in less than 30 years among white workers in the Midwest, linked to the disappearance of places to socialize.^[5]

“Existence is first founded through the gaze of others. When this is no longer present, when we no longer meet people who look at us, who talk to us, then our existence simply no longer exists. Our existence is eliminated.”^[6]

Loneliness is therefore a profoundly political evil. But it is precisely because it is born in the absence of consideration, in social indifference, that the first area to occupy is obvious: the public space re-appropriated by and for popular, collective uses. It is the crucible of the fight “against the forgetting of our humanity”.

“We carry the fever and chaos of this world but we see far beyond”.^[7]

The fact of being lonely, that is to say of being more than alone because kept aside, marginalised, maintains a damaged relationship with others, leads to mistrust then suspicion, sometimes to the point of feverish symbolic or physical violence. From there, we can observe a vicious circle starting from unequal isolation towards an extreme right-wing vote which withdraws and maintains itself in a fixed identity.^[8] But this circle is not inevitable. Many are the experiences of Yellow Vests that demonstrate this.

On the roundabout we heal from our wounded relationship with the Other. We think about our wounds with her/him, building a politics of proximity that can heal the fractures of society:

“Together we launched/a large public meeting. Hard to speak in front of a whole room,/the day before we were in the down in the dumps:/- Will they come, won’t they?/ Along the little roads, in the middle of winter/two hundred and fifty came! Three hours of testimonies and discussions./At the end, we kissed, laughing like beloved children!/It was off again to continue for a long time.”^[9]

From and sometimes on the roundabouts, the meaning and relevance of a wounded collective is reinvented: we outline a politics of socialisation (“Ah! Yes, and also/we put everything in common.”^[10]; “the wealth of France/which is rightly common to us.”^[11]), we talk about taxation and redistribution (“multi-billionaires/who do not pay France/what they owe it: their taxes/that is say our public services.”^[12]) and we develop a cooperative and popular education which gives meaning to existence (“Sometimes we are nothing because we no longer know anything.”^[13]; or again the yellow heralds who shout out, in demonstrations, the “Code of ethics of the police and the national gendarmerie”, a lyrical gesture of awareness and warning).

Roundabouts have been the stitches of the scars of our loneliness. For months, they contributed to revitalizing the social body.

“And you, are you [RIC](#) or not RIC?”/“Resignation, he won’t do it! / So a 6th [Republic]? A Constituent [Assembly]?...”/We create with our heads and hands,/we develop, we our-debate [*on notre-débat*], we act/and then we vote.”

This civic re-appropriation, this creation of a sensitive community which held together on the roundabouts, is this the reason why the State qualified them as “dangerous”? A rhetorical question. Yet what is more dangerous for a State than losing “the foundation, the firm base on which all the dreams we have are rooted”, [\[14\]](#) that is to say the trust of its citizens?

I would like to focus on the neologism: “we our-debate” [*on notre-débat*]. The hyphen is evocative, we cannot help but see it as a snub to the [Grand Debate](#) which will only have marked the separation between on one side those who “dominate” in the centre, ranting and raving, and on the other, the “dominated”, invited to ask questions of course, but as a captive audience, and for the results that we know. But it is above all the transition from the noun to the verb that appeals to me: the “our-debate” is not the passive debate we are witnessing. It is the act of debating (“we”) without denying our interlocutor, in a space of shared speech (“our”).

It is verbalising in the first sense of the term: a psychological process which helps to express and learn to (re)know oneself better. From this point of view, verbalisation is a democratic act in that it breaks with the elitist injunction to silence the people; it challenges epistemic inequalities which despise popular knowledge. By testifying to these slogans and refrains:

“Life isn’t that,/that’s not what they do to us”; “Let it change”; “ Enough is enough !”; “Ah! It’ll be fine, it’ll be fine/We’ll fire all the [CAC40s](#)!”; “And whose street is it?/The street is ours!”

To say all this, and beforehand to dare to say it, we need times and public spaces where we can give ourselves over to the conditions of confidence in the face of the uncertainty of the world. This confidence is not the assurance made by a handful that tomorrow will be bright. This trust is the one that is built in the humility of doing things together, to rediscover the possibility of an open political life outside our homes, in the squares, at the crossroads of our lives.

So, to occupy a roundabout has become to occupy hope.[\[15\]](#) Tomb and future, home of our democratic emotions and the resting place of the martyrs. Everywhere in France they could be the places of this “Glorious birth” of a real democracy. If it has not (yet) happened, there nonetheless remain the seeds sown by these songs of hope which rose up from the roundabouts, against loneliness.

“Was it the sea that appeared or the forest or the fire/Or the snow or the woman or the glory of the cities/What was the dazzling sign, the sun glimpsed/And which made each of us cry out: “I want to be”! [...]/I want to be!, cried each of us, and we were”.[\[16\]](#)

For Olivier Daurelle[\[17\]](#)

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Illustration : Jean-Pierre Sageot

- [1] Selections from “Peuple Jaune”, Myriam Eckert, *in De la valse des ronds-points aux cahiers de la colère*, Bordeaux, Éditions Rébelio, 2023, p. 457.
- [2] Ilarie Voronca, “Refaire le monde”, *Contre solitude*, Plein Chant, 2006, p.28.
- [3] See the studies of Émile Durkheim on the question of suicide:
<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/superfail/emile-durkheim-un-suicide-sociologique-4805878> ; <https://chaire-philosophie.fr/le-suicide-comme-fait-social-autour-de-la-pensee-demile-durkheim/> ; and the particular continuation of this work by the late Daniel Cohen:
<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/le-meilleur-des-mondes/qui-est-homo-numericus-entretien-avec-daniel-cohen-9181700>.
- [4] See the [CRÉDOC](#) study, “Les solitudes en France. Un tissu social fragilisé par la pandémie” by Solen Berhuet, Sandra Hoibian, Novembre 2021 ([file:///D:/Downloads/Sou2021-4836.pdf](#)).
- [5] See Anne Case et Angus Deaton, *Morts de désespoir. L’avenir du capitalisme*, PUF, 2021. For a summary, read:
https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/03/12/morts-de-desespoir-les-ravages-du-capitalisme-predateur-sur-la-classe-ouvriere-americaine_6072835_3232.html
- [6] For an analysis of our contemporary solitudes which does not neglect to open up on to an optimistic horizon for a more united society, see Matthieu Chaigne, *La Fabrique des solitaires*, Éditions de l’Aube, 2022.
- [7] “Peuple Jaune”, Myriam Eckert, op.cit. p.458.
- [8] See, among others, Guillaume Le Blanc, “Panique d’identité. Dans la tête des sympathisants du Rassemblement national”, *Esprit*, vol. , no. 10, 2023, pp. 81-89

and Pierre Zaoui, “De la fascisation. Signifiants, corps et flux”, *Esprit*, vol. , no. 10, 2023, pp. 91-100.

[9] Excerpt from “J’irai”, Rose-Marie Naime, in *De la valse des ronds-points aux cahiers de la colère*, p.482.

[10] “Cité 3”, Rose-Marie Naime, *op. cit.*, p.477.

[11] *Ibid.*, p.479.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*, p.478.

[14] “Peuple Jaune”, Myriam Eckert, *op.cit.*, p.458.

[15] To employ the title of the book by Marina Garcés, to be published in 15/12/2023 by Éditions Deux-Cent-Cinq: *Occuper l’espoir : Barcelone, 1996-2017*.

[16] Ilarie Voronca, “Glorieuse naissance”, *Contre solitude*, Plein Chant, 2006, p.59.

[17] Olivier Daurelle, a yellow vest of the “Campanile”, in reference to the hotel next to the camp, was killed (“murder-accident” writes Rose-Marie Naime) by a truck. His comrades planted an olive tree on the site in his memory. It was a way of marking the territory of popular presence, of leaving the trace of the “invisibles” who can no longer resign themselves to being invisible.

5 years after the emergence of the Yellow Vest movement, Cerveaux Non Disponibles invite us to plunge back into this unprecedented uprising. Using

archive images and giving voice to those who experienced it from the inside as well as observers, this film attempts to restore the power of this battle for a better world: “The opportunity to remember how love and friendship were the main driving force behind this fire of joy/bonfire.” ([lundi matin](#) #403, 13/11/2023)

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